



PHOTOGRAPHY/ GARRY BRYANT

Smoke billows over the hills above Midway, viewed from U.S. 40 around 6 p.m. Monday.

Midway won't let wildfire wipe out Swiss Days

■ **Biggest event:** Festivities may be powered by generator. Tens of thousands usually attend.

By **Patty Honetz**
Deseret News staff writer

Smoke from Utah's worst wildfire in decades still hung heavy over the Heber Valley when Midway townspeople made their decision: They aren't going to cancel Swiss Days.

"It's like they said today — we have to keep on with our lives," said Peggy McKenzie, assistant manager at the Tri-Mart gas station and convenience mart near Midway's Town Square.

Held annually over Labor Day weekend, Swiss Days is Midway's biggest event, when residents host the tens of thousands who converge on the tiny Town Square for a parade, bell ringers, barbecue, chuckwagon breakfast, craft fair, food booths and entertainment.

This year, however, the festival could be generator-powered.

The fire knocked out Midway's electricity Sunday. By Monday, Heber Power and Light had rounded up enough generators to keep everyone going for as long as necessary, said spokesman Dick Klason.

McKenzie, at the register of what may well have been Midway's busiest business Monday, wasn't sure how many people would come to Swiss Days this year — perhaps thousands and thousands, anyway. The idea of running the event on generators made her laugh out loud.

The festival is the capstone of the town's summer season. A weekend always guaranteed to pump cash into the local economy, it has become even more important this year as businesspeople begin to take a look at what the fire has done to the tourist trade in the last days of summer.

"The accountants were busy in their office today," said Kevin DeWitt, innkeeper at The Homestead, Midway's year-round resort. "This is the peak week in the peak season," he said. "These two days could be equal to 10 days in other weeks."

The Homestead had to relocate its guests Sunday, and on Monday was still empty. A skeleton crew culled from the more than 200 resort staffers answered calls from all over the country from people calling to get fire information, and kitchen workers put together sandwiches and salads for reporters and firefighters who stopped by the inn.

DeWitt said The Homestead would be open again Tuesday but said the two business days lost would have a significant effect on the inn.

At Wasatch Mountain State Park, a ranger said 2,000 people per day normally would be in the park or on the golf course. The park's closure has meant losses of \$5,000 per day from the golf course alone.

"We have a big Labor Day weekend coming up, and we're not really sure how we're going to work it," said Dan Morgan. "Swiss Days could create some traffic problems for fire crews getting in and out."

The park was closed again Tuesday, which meant the cancellation of a major golf tournament. Another tournament planned for Wednesday probably will be rescheduled, he said. While the tournaments aren't big moneymakers, they are events local residents look forward to, he said.

But back at the Tri-Mart, business was non-stop. McKenzie said they had sold probably twice the usual amounts of coffee and gasoline, in large part because the store stayed open all night Sunday and Monday instead of closing at 11 p.m. McKenzie said most of the customers have been firefighters. "We're here for them if they need us. And they have," she said.

FIRE

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"The fire was burning so fast you could not drive a car out fast enough to escape it," one firefighter said.

Buehler said that because the fire was moving through heavy timber, the crews would have a harder time constructing the firebreak.

The ridgetops are wetter than the lower elevations, he said, and the fire could be expected to burn slower there, "but it still can give us problems," he said.

The winds were expected to be lighter Tuesday, and then could pick up again Wednesday. "We've got that working against us, but then, we always have," he said. "It could have been worse than it is. It's not over, but it's looking better."

Some tropical moisture could trickle into Utah — mainly the eastern part — through Thursday, according to William J. Alder, meteorologist in charge of the Salt Lake office of the National Weather Service.

Crews from around the Wasatch area were busy again Tuesday constructing firebreaks on ridges and around individual cabins. Three air tankers flew repeated fire-retardant drops on hot spots. The drops cooled the blaze, enabling handcrews to work the fire, Buehler said.

The firefighting force Monday included crews from the state, U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, Wasatch County and Utah State Prison. The cities of Park City, Provo, Orem, Lehi, Pleasant Grove and American Fork also sent units.

State officials said firefighting efforts had cost more than \$3 million by Tuesday.

With additional crews from northern and southern Utah, as well as Idaho, Nevada and Wyoming recruited to battle the blaze, firefighters' ranks swelled to 675. Heavy equipment, including helicopters with the capacity to carry 1,000 gallons of water, arrived at the site.

"We're hopeful when we get all our manpower and equipment in we can hold the fire," Buehler said.

But other officials expressed concern.

Wasatch County Commissioner Pete Coleman said some of the subdivisions were built 35 years ago, before the county changed its zoning laws. Thus, there's one way in and out — no emergency exits.

"If it (the fire) goes into Oak Ha-